



“Super Seniors”: Who, What, Why, and How Many?

Editor’s note: This is Part III in a three-part series on Super Seniors.

The severity of the recent budget cuts to the CSU system and to California State University, Stanislaus, has raised questions regarding how to deal with super seniors. In fact, these concerns resulted in policy action by the CSU Board of Trustees that prescribes authority to campus presidents to employ a variety of enrollment management tools, one of which is to facilitate the graduation of students in order to make room for other new students. In effect, campuses may enable additional tools to preclude students who have met all the necessary degree requirements from enrolling in courses by conferring their degrees.

Here we describe super seniors by the college of their program major and display the number of students that fall into this category. Table 1 shows the colleges with units earned summarized into three categories: 120-139 units, 140-159 units, and 160+ units. The row percentages describe the proportion of units within each college. The column percentages describe the proportion of the college within each unit category. The total percentages for college and the total percentages for units are also shown.

Table 1. Super Seniors: Number and Percent Units by College, Fall 2009

College	Units Earned			
	120-139	140-159	160+	Total
College of Business Administration	85	31	15	131
	row% 64.9%	23.7%	11.4%	100.0%
	column% 25.9%	25.8%	28.8%	26.2%
College of Education	58	19	4	81
	row% 71.6%	23.5%	4.9%	100.0%
	column% 17.7%	15.8%	7.7%	16.2%
College of Human and Health Sciences	51	19	11	81
	row% 63.0%	23.5%	13.6%	100.0%
	column% 15.5%	15.8%	21.2%	16.2%
College of Humanities and Social Sciences	58	15	6	79
	row% 73.4%	19.0%	7.6%	100.0%
	column% 17.7%	12.5%	11.5%	15.8%
College of Natural Sciences	56	22	8	86
	row% 65.1%	25.6%	9.3%	100.0%
	column% 17.1%	18.3%	15.4%	17.2%
College of the Arts	20	14	8	42
	row% 47.6%	33.3%	19.1%	100.0%
	column% 6.1%	11.7%	15.4%	8.4%
Total	328	120	52	500
	row% 65.6%	24.0%	10.4%	100.0%
	column% 100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: PeopleSoft student record extract, October 19, 2009. OIR analysis, November 23, 2009.

Column Percentages. In terms of the totals overall, about one-quarter (26.2%) of super seniors are majors in the College of Business Administration (CBA). The smallest proportion is the College of the Arts (COA) at 8.4 percent. If we examine the column percentages for each unit-category, we find about one-quarter (25.9%) of CBA super seniors appear in the 120-139 unit-category compared to 17.7 percent for College of Education (COE) and 17.7 percent for College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS). In the highest 160+ unit category, the CBA is more than one-quarter of the seniors (28.8%). The smallest is the COE at 7.7 percent.

Row Percentages. Looking at the row percentages, the COE (71.6%) and CHSS (73.4%) reveal the highest percentages of super seniors in the 120 to 139-unit category. The COA row percentages (although with small numbers), shows a proportionately larger percentage of seniors in the category 140-159 units (33.3%), followed by the College of Natural Sciences (CNS) at 25.6 percent. The unit category 160+ units show COA with the highest percentage (19.1%).

As noted previously (*Analysis Brief*, Vol. 1, No. 8), there appears to be differences by gender. Table 2 displays unit categories separately for females and males by college. Of the 500 super seniors, 298 or 59.6 percent are female. Table 2 collapses all categories into two groups of units: 120-139 units and 140+ units. The row percentages compare females and males within the college. In the CBA 42.4 percent of males are in the

excess 140+ unit category, compared to 27.7 percent for females. In the COE, females (33.9%) have a greater presence in the 140+ unit category than males (16.0%). In the CHHS, males are much more pronounced (42.9%) in the excess unit category than females (35.8%). In the CHSS, males (32.3%) comprise the greater proportion in the 140+ unit category compared to females (22.9%). In the CNS, the proportion is slightly greater for males (37.8%) than for females (31.7%). In the COA, more than half of females (52.4%) are in the excess units earned category, as are more than half of males (52.4%).

Table 2. Super Seniors: Number and Percent Units by Gender by College, Fall 2009

College	Female			Male		
	120-139	140+	Total	120-139	140+	Total
College of Business Administration	47	18	65	38	28	66
	72.3%	27.7%	100.0%	57.6%	42.4%	100.0%
College of Education	37	19	56	21	4	25
	66.1%	33.9%	100.0%	84.0%	16.0%	100.0%
College of Human and Health Sciences	43	24	67	8	6	14
	64.2%	35.8%	100.0%	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
College of Humanities and Social Sciences	37	11	48	21	10	31
	77.1%	22.9%	100.0%	67.7%	32.3%	100.0%
College of Natural Sciences	28	13	41	28	17	45
	68.3%	31.7%	100.0%	62.2%	37.8%	100.0%
College of the Arts	10	11	21	10	11	21
	47.6%	52.4%	100.0%	47.6%	52.4%	100.0%
Total	202	96	298	126	76	202
	67.8%	32.2%	100.0%	62.4%	37.6%	100.0%

Source: PeopleSoft student record extract, October 19, 2009. OIR analysis, November 23, 2009.

Informing Policy and Practice

The following thoughts and suggestions are offered: 1) Not all undergraduate degree programs have the same unit requirements. The formulation of policy to facilitate graduation of super seniors should examine the requirements of degree major programs on a case-by-case basis.² 2) Each college dean and department chair should be alerted when their students reach senior status (90 units); 90 units should signal the need to review, to advise, and to monitor the progress of the senior. 3) Each major program should be alerted and provided with additional background or profile information, such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, and GPA, and should collaborate with other university student services units that may also be responsible for monitoring and advising the progress and success of students (first generation students, EOP, low income students, minority or cultural groups). 4) Faculty governance should be consulted with on matters of policy formation that is designed to facilitate the progress of students towards successful and timely degree. Policy may be formulated, for example, to give students with good senior standing, priority enrollment in courses in addition to requiring official signature “sign-off” of the academic advisor to verify enrollment priority and plan. 5) Finally, all new and continuing students should be clearly advised and informed upon enrollment, and at every stage of academic orientation or advising, as to the policies and practices of the University pertaining to the facilitation of graduation.

About the Office of Institutional Research (IR).

IR is responsible for compiling student data, for analyzing and presenting statistical information from many university-wide sources regarding applications received, new enrollments, continuing enrollments, credentials awarded and degrees conferred for each term of the college year. IR also fulfills the reporting requirements of the Office of the Chancellor, the State of California Legislature, as well as Federal reporting requirements, and is also central to fulfilling the University’s need for informed decision-making.

² Among the eleven major programs above the 120-unit requirement, eleven have requirements ranging from 121 units to 148 units; these include eight majors that are BS degree programs, one a BM program, one a BFA, and one a BA degree program.